

CHAPTER 8: PUBLIC INPUT

This chapter of the plan details public input received as part of the land use planning process. Two public input meetings were held during the planning process. The first public input meeting established a vision based on key elements to the establishment of goals and policies. The second public input meeting was held to solicit additional input from Sunset Beach residents. However, only members of the Planning Board and Town Council were in attendance thus resulting in little input for the plan. The most significant source of public input came as a result of the community survey. In total, more than 900 respondents completed the survey. Those results are summarized in part two of this chapter.

VISION SESSION RESULTS

On October 30, 2015 a visioning session was held as part of the land use planning process. Approximately 25 members of the public and local government leaders attended the meeting. The categories identified in the following list represent the seven key elements of Sunset Beach's shared Vision. These vision elements were developed by the citizens and representative of Town leadership using a guided visualization and by responding to the question:

What do we, as the citizens of Sunset Beach, want to see in place for our community by 2020 (five years from now)?

The seven key Vision elements describe Sunset Beach's desired future and serve as a guide for future initiatives.

1. Improved Standards to Maintain Small Town Charm

- attractive landscaping Sunset Beach North (trees, shrubs)
- architecture standards for island business district
- keep small Town feel
- implement 2010 vision statement (small Town feel)
- improved landscaping on Main St. & gazebo

2. Enacted Model Stormwater System

- stormwater, absorbs into land, not through outflows
- storm drainage
- improve water quality

3. Attractive, Strategic Business Growth

- reputation to attract small business
- reduce red tape

- respect for property rights (business)
- more shopping & restaurants (island)
- less commercial, no franchise!
- jobs for people
- property rights - residential
- allow residential in business district on island
- redevelop business centers between Post Office & 179
- attract more tourism
- promote Sunset Beach as a place to live rather than just a place to visit
- board members with relevant experience, e.g., planning board, people appointed to boards
- share Town resources with neighboring Towns
- population growth to encourage business growth
- additional island amenities, e.g., dining, small shops, & more

4. Managed, Targeted Public Parking

- Parking - charge
- organized beach parking
- regulate parking
- improved parking on Main Street and gazebo

5. Preserved & Protected Coastal Resources & Community

- pristine beach – waste bags for pets at beach accesses
- island development respects environment
- more amenities to enjoy in natural setting
- minimized development in high hazard areas
- new construction does not adversely affect environmental concerns
- expanded bird island has been incorporated into the Town

6. Expanded Opportunities for Recreational & Cultural Activities

- sidewalks & bike paths to create walking community
- promote activity around park – arts, dining, & more
- safe areas for walking & biking on island
- community center building for art activities
- community center
- seasonal events (arts, concerts)
- outdoor sculpture displays
- connected neighborhoods throughout Town in multiple ways
- outdoor locations for art shows & plein-air artists

- access for public to tidal marsh
- a public art gallery

7. Developed Services for Seniors

- senior housing available
- senior transportation free
- lifeguards
- healthcare access for aging population

Based on the results of the session, a vision statement was established. While the vision statement below is generally supported, Town stakeholders believe that the vision statement created as part of the 2010 Land Use Plan should take precedent.

Over the next 20 years, the Town of Sunset Beach will be attractive to residents, businesses, and tourists as a community with pristine natural resources; easily accessible coastal, recreational, cultural, and senior amenities; a diversity of transportation choices; and its own unique small-town charm.

2010 Vision Statement:

The Town of Sunset Beach intends to promote and support the orderly economic and aesthetic growth and development of the community in accordance with its adopted Land Use Plan and development-related ordinances. The Town of Sunset Beach desires to maintain its unique coastal-town character by promoting lower-density and single-family residential development as its primary growth pattern. The Town also recognizes that it coexists with a fragile coastal environment, and it shall seek to preserve and conserve the land and estuarine water, including its beach and golf course amenities that have made this community a highly desirable place to live. Furthermore, the Town values being responsive to the public and improving the quality of life for all its citizens, to this end, the Town shall continually seek the involvement, input and various viewpoints of its citizens during the Town's official consideration of land use and development decisions.

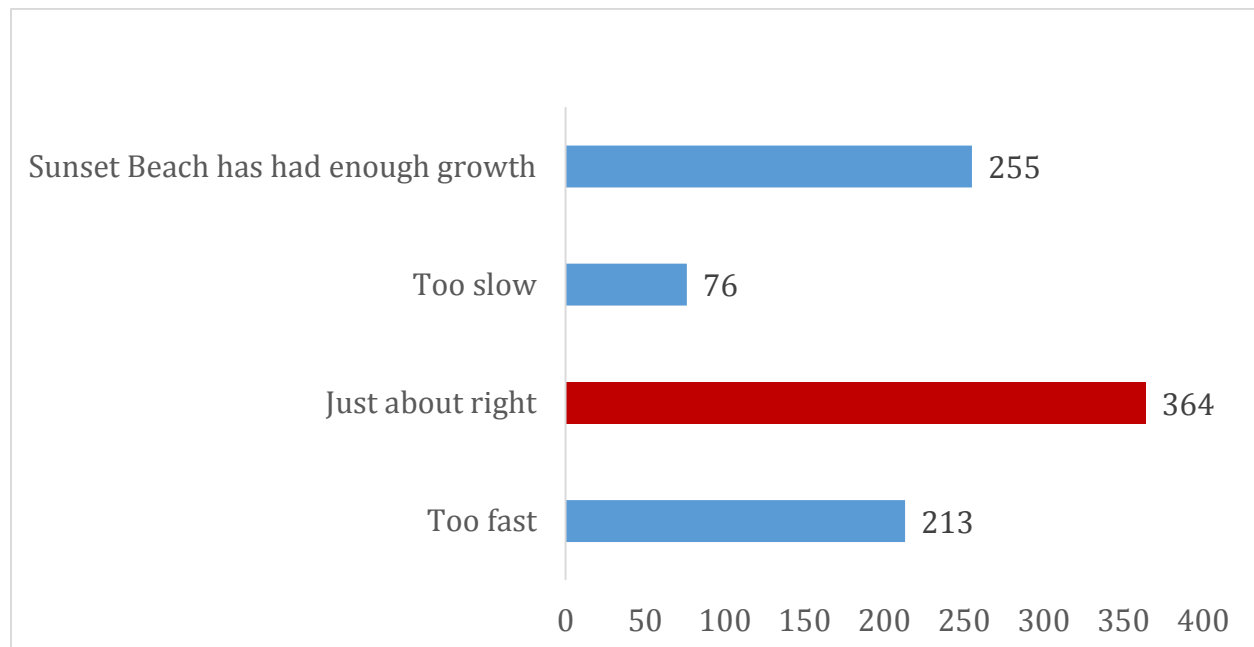
More important, the key elements and brainstorm ideas indicate that the public has a desire to cater to more than the retirement population and that a more diversified population base should be supported and encouraged. Additional amenities and businesses are desired that would support working families and the coastal lifestyle. Most significant, however, is the desire to maintain the small town charm and character of Sunset Beach.

COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS

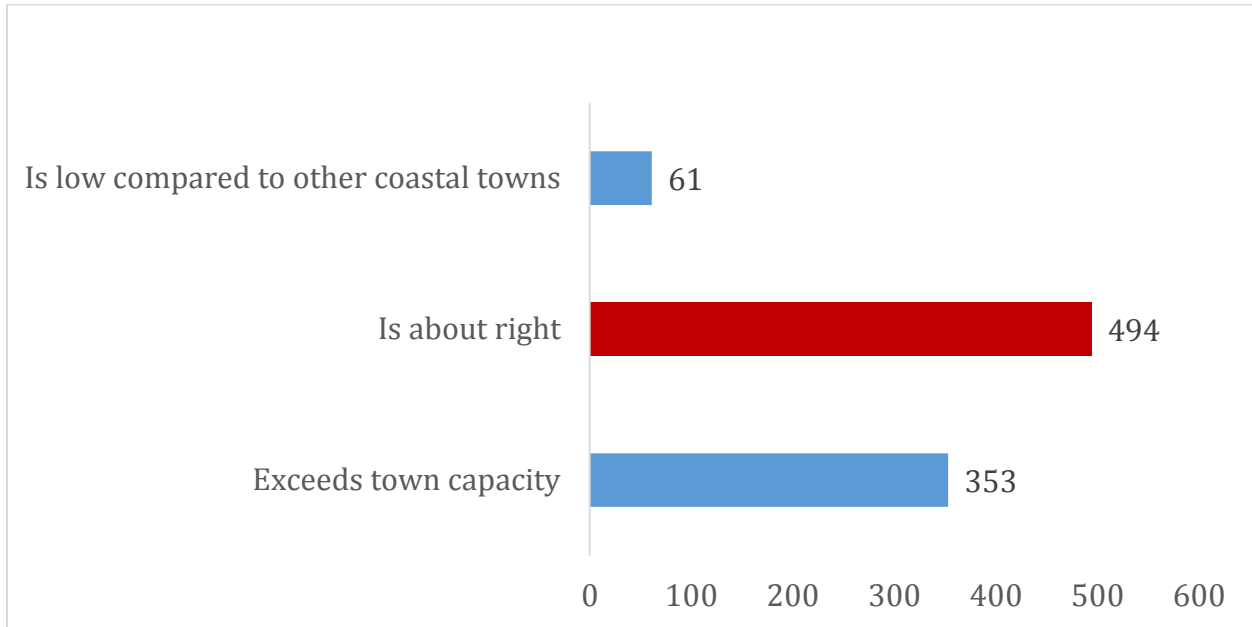
A short survey was distributed to Sunset Beach residents and property owners. The survey was available primarily online, but was also available in hard copy format. The survey was designed to determine the most significant priorities for Sunset Beach and to reaffirm public opinion regarding growth management and development. The results of the survey are nearly identical to those captured as part of the 2010 Land Use Plan process.

In total, there were 914 responses to the community survey. More than 10% of the permanent resident population responded to the survey, which is a noteworthy response rate. Furthermore, 92% of the respondents were property owners, thus giving credence to the survey results. These results are provided on the following pages. Appendix 1 provides a summary of the results based on the category of the respondent (year-round resident, second homeowner, business owner, and seasonal visitor).

Question 1: Do you feel that growth and development in Sunset Beach is happening....

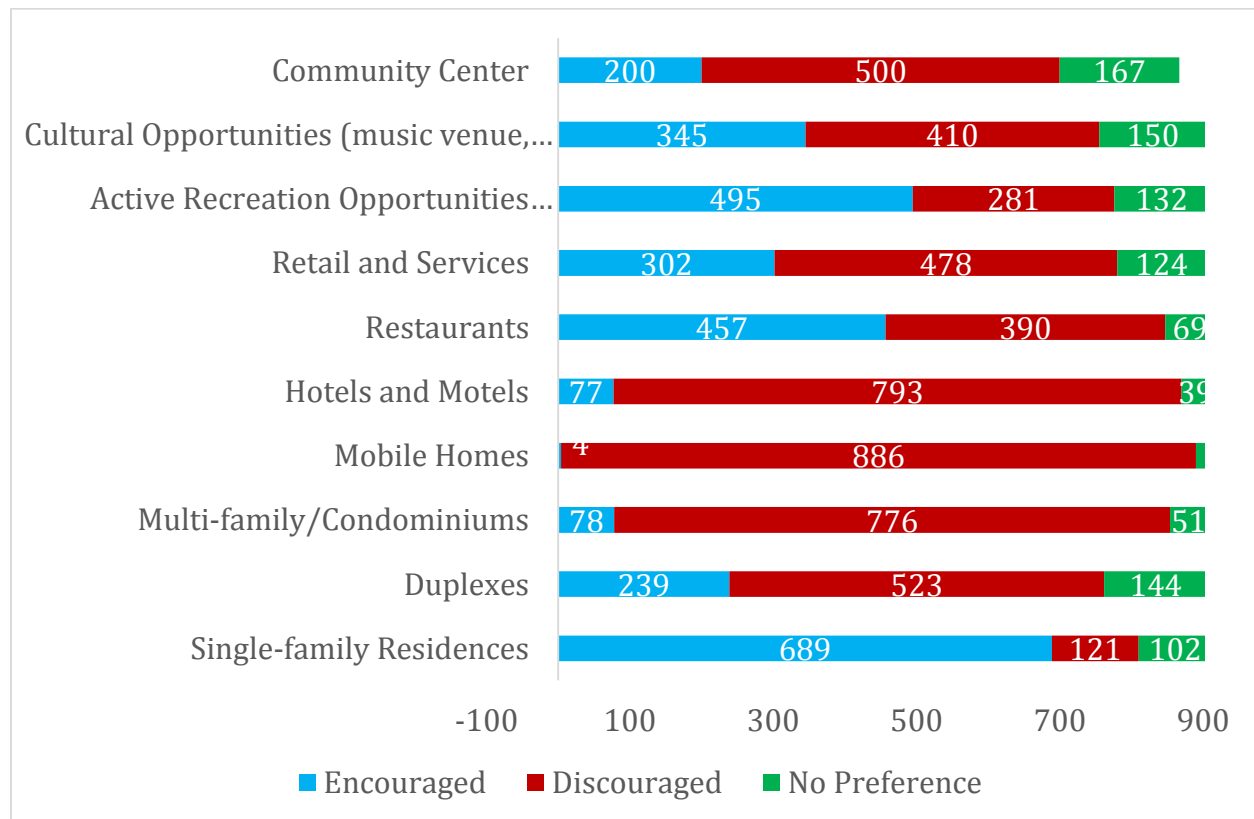


The majority of respondents believe that the pace of growth and development in Sunset Beach is just about right. However, when added together, more responses were received in total stating that growth is occurring too fast or that the Town has had enough growth. Public sentiment regarding the pace of growth and development therefore appears to be negative, when taken as a whole.

Question 2: Do you feel that the summer seasonal population and tourist population...

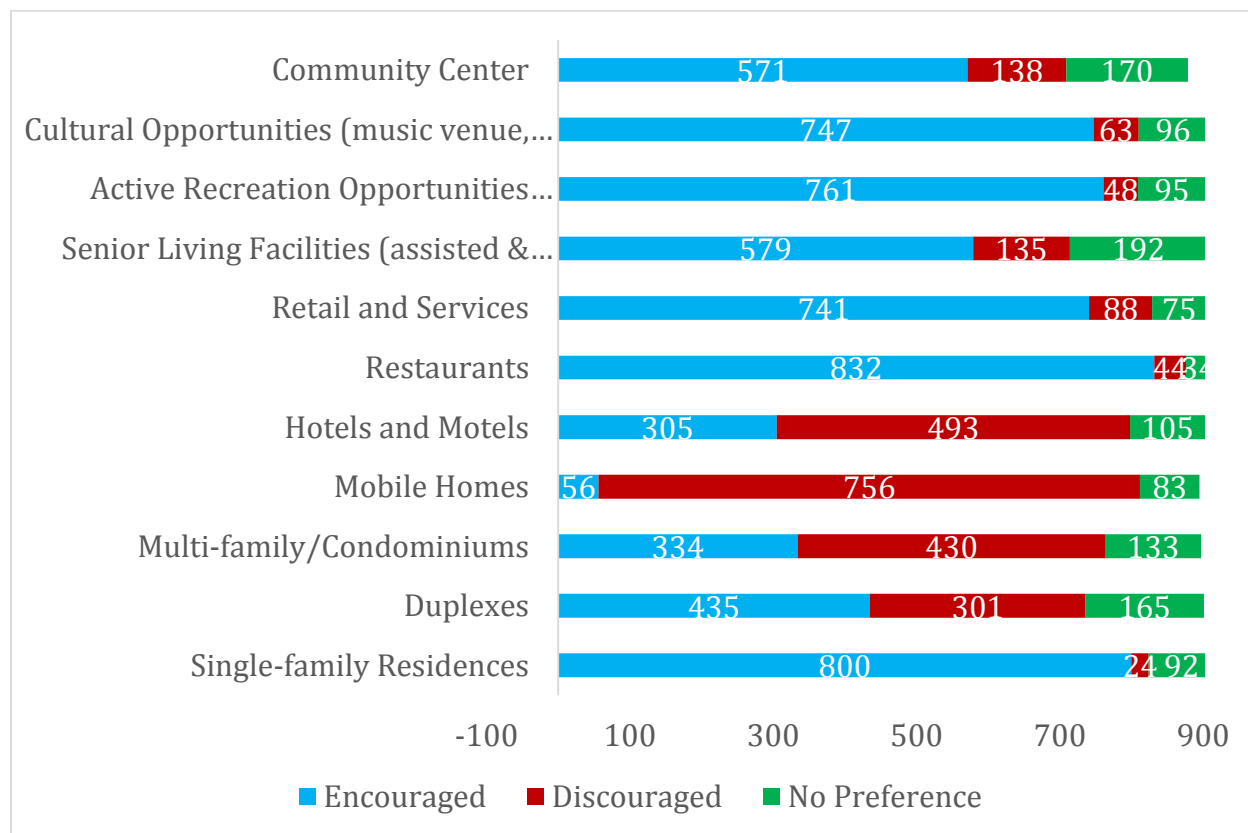
According to survey results, 54% of respondents believe that the summer seasonal population is about right. Conversely, a little less than half of the respondents believe that the seasonal growth exceeds Town capacity. This indicates a moderate concern among residents and property owners about the seasonal population. Very few respondents believe the summer seasonal population is low compared to other coastal Towns.

Question 3: The Town is made up of two distinct geographic areas (island and mainland). What type of development should be encouraged or discouraged on the ISLAND portions of Town?



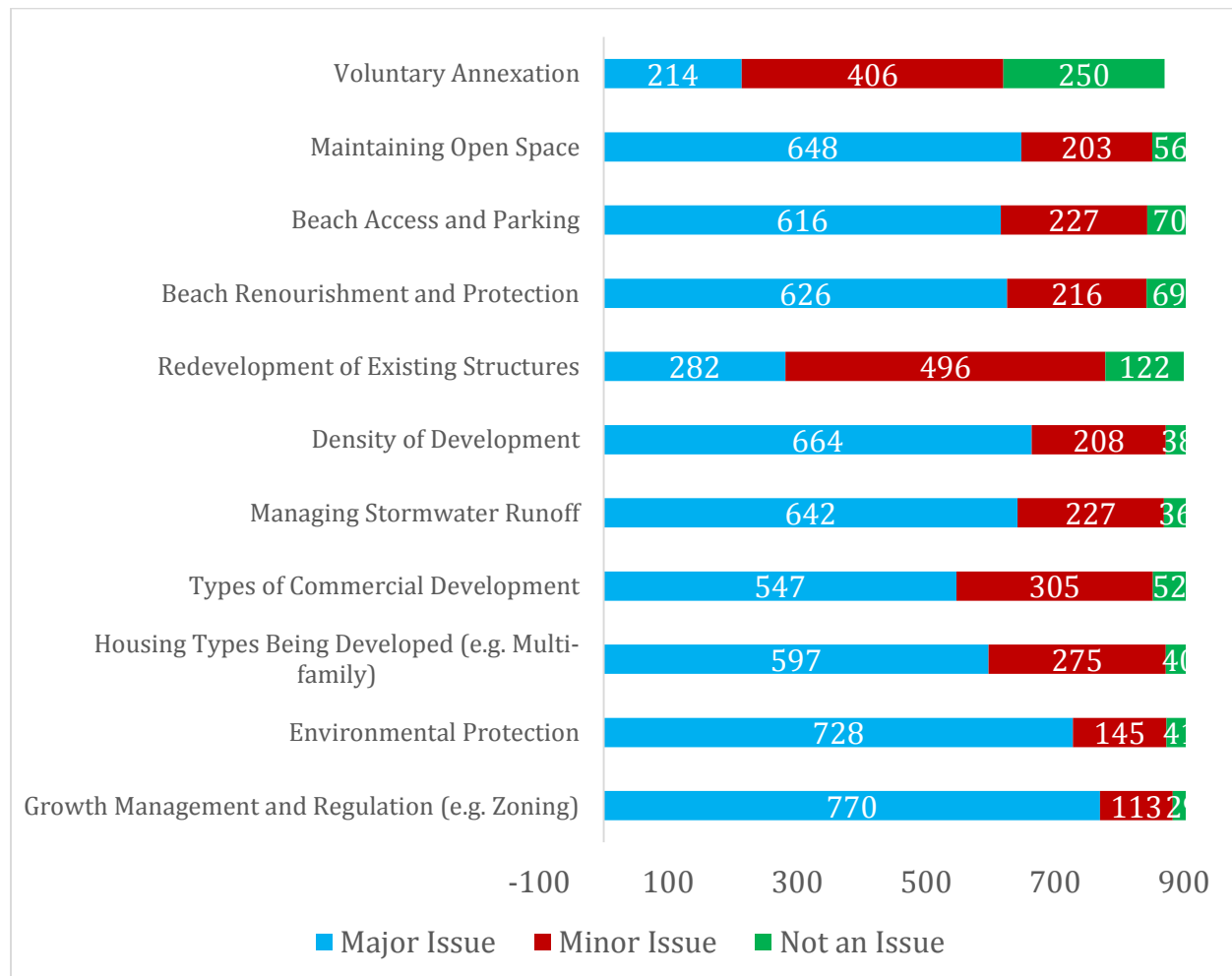
When asked what development types should be encouraged and discouraged on the island portion of Sunset Beach, respondents noted that single-family residences should be the most encouraged and that mobile homes should be the most discouraged. This reaffirms past public sentiment regarding development on the island portion of the Town. Of note, however, is the encouragement of restaurants on the island. This indicates a desire for additional eating establishments for island residents and seasonal visitors. Active recreation opportunities are also an important on the island. In addition, hotels, motels, multi-family, condominiums, and duplexes are strongly discouraged. This shows discontent for high density projects.

Question 4: The Town is made up of two distinct geographic areas (island and mainland). What type of development should be encouraged or discouraged on the **MAINLAND portions of Town?**



Similar to the results of question 3, the vast majority of respondents support development of single-family residences and more options for dining. Mobile homes, hotels and motels, and multi-family development should be discouraged on the mainland according to survey respondents. Overall, respondents support a more diversified development pattern on the mainland than on the island. Similar to the previous question, high density projects are strongly discouraged.

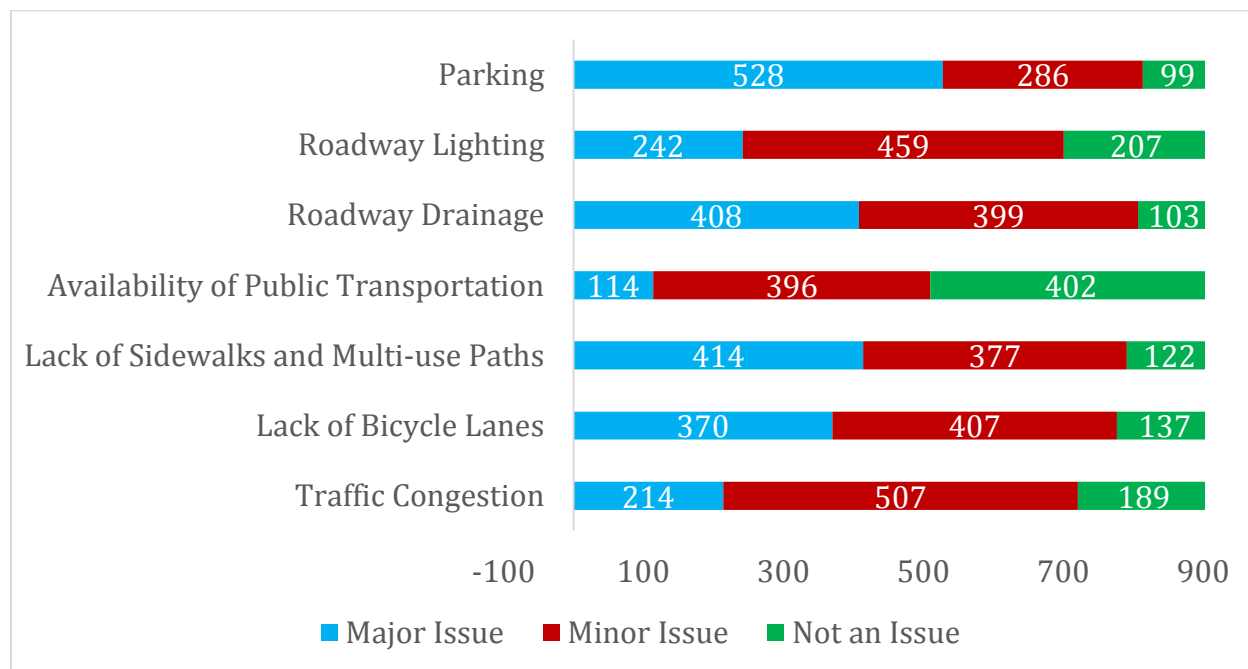
Question 5: What do you think are the most important growth and development issues facing Sunset Beach?



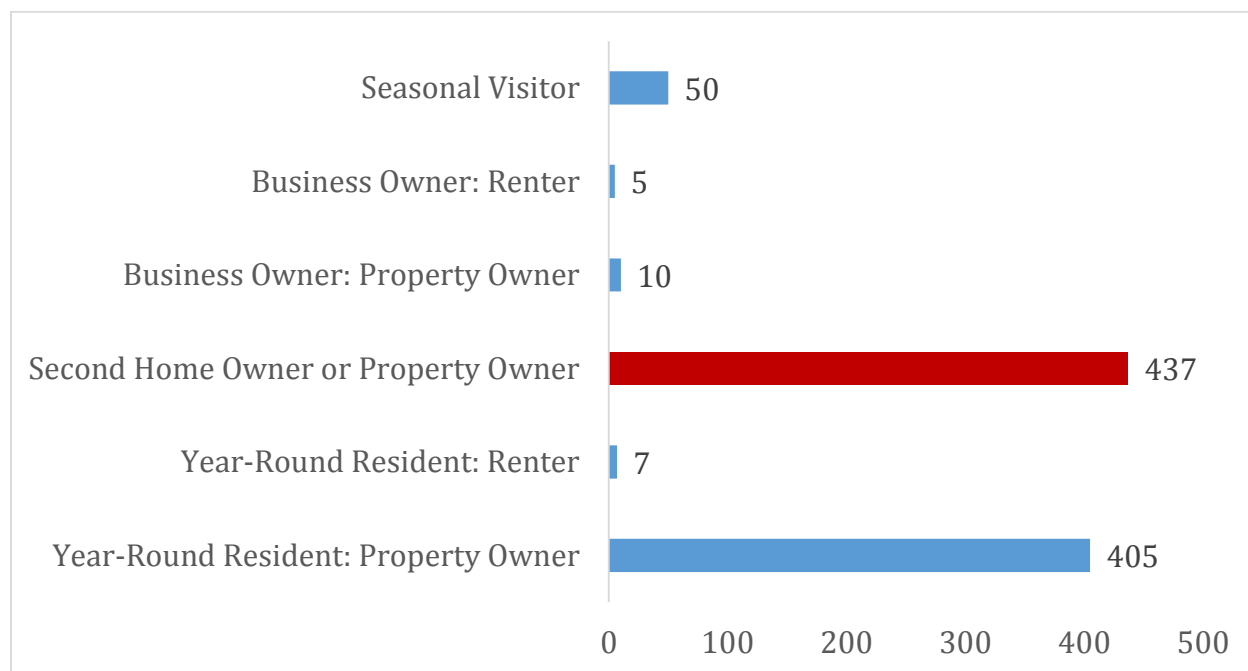
Survey respondents believe growth management and regulation is the most significant issue facing Sunset Beach from a growth and development perspective. This indicates a need to focus efforts on appropriate regulatory controls for future development in the Town's planning jurisdiction. Other issues receiving a significant number of responses relate to environmental protection. Maintaining open space and managing stormwater runoff are interrelated to environmental protection. Density of development was also identified as an important growth and development issue. Based on other survey responses, this indicates a desire to maintain or reduce development density in the planning jurisdiction.

Other issues identified by respondents beyond the choices provide include concerns over beach parking and speeding on island streets. Limiting commercial development was also identified as a need, as well as protecting Bird Island as a sanctuary.

Question 6: What do you think are the most important transportation issues facing Sunset Beach?



Parking was identified by respondents as the most significant transportation issue in Sunset Beach. A lack of sidewalks and multi-use paths (greenways) was also identified as a major transportation issue by nearly half of the survey respondents. The importance of these two transportation issues reaffirm public sentiment on the matters. Multiple comments related to island parking and the availability of sidewalks were provided by survey respondents in the comment section of the question. Traffic congestion, lack of bicycle lanes, and roadway lighting were identified as minor issues.

Question 7: What best describes your residency status in Sunset Beach?

Approximately 92% of the survey responses were received by second home owners/property owners (47%) or year round resident property owners (45%). Based on these results, the Town should feel confident in using priorities identified in the survey to set goals or develop future policies as the astounding majority of respondents are property owners. Only 6% of respondents reported being seasonal visitors. Business property owners, business renters, and year-round resident renters accounted for a small percentage of respondents.

Question 8: Please provide any other comments you may have.

Many of the comments received relate to parking issues: many respondents want parking permits for residents while others want to install parking meters or limit parking by non-residents on Town streets. Other respondents voiced their concerns about increased development on the west and east ends of the island. Opposition to the current tax rate, the Town's spending in recent years, poor road drainage, and the need to dredge Tubbs Inlet was also mentioned. A desire to maintain the quiet, family-oriented nature of the community was among the most frequent comments shared by respondents.